

BOOK REVIEW

Family, Self, and Psychotherapy: A Person-Centered Perspective

Ned L. Gaylin

Herefordshire, UK: PCCS Books (2001)

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The field of family therapy has become extremely well established. As a graduate student specializing in Marital and Family therapy, I have learned many of the theories designed to help assess and determine interventions with families. The structural, strategic, and eco-systemic approaches have been developed specifically for this specialty. The paradigm shift in conceptualization that these theories require is a big leap from working with individual issues. That is not to say that theories designed to work with individuals cannot be modified when the family is the client. Indeed, it is the creativity required because each case is unique that allows us as therapists to continually learn and refine our skills.

The textbooks my professor's have chosen to use typically include chapters for each of the different theories. These chapters include the theoretical rationale, a summarization of the main points, and counseling techniques developed from that perspective. This provides students the opportunity to become knowledgeable of all, but masters of none. It is from this realm of beginning my work in the field from which I write.

The book by Ned L. Gaylin "*Family, Self and Psychotherapy: a person-centered approach*" is a comprehensive guide designed to promote thought about the family in many different contexts. He explores the family from an individual person-centered perspective, an intra- and interpersonal person-centered perspective, and a holistic person-centered perspective. This holistic aspect encompasses the multitude of dynamics that occur when working with families. The book weaves key points of marital and family work together with a personal touch that keeps the reading very enjoyable. It is the humanistic aspect of this work that touched me and made me want to keep reading.

The chapter on development of the self and its context uses the work of Carl Rogers as a base from which to explore the issues of self actualization, self-awareness in all of our roles, self-esteem, and developmental issues related to individuals and how they then affect the family. The exploration of psychological well-being which allows for creative expression is a powerful concept to consider. Creative expression encourages openness, growth, and freedom while being contained by rules, expectations, and fear. Common sense tells us that the environment within the home regarding all these variables will have far reaching consequences not only for each individual but for the family as well.

Dr. Gaylin states that the person-centered therapist is working towards the goal of helping the client to feel congruent meaning their perception and experience of self are constant. This requires a confident internal locus of evaluation and assumes that the more we

believe our success measures up to our expectations, the better we feel about ourselves. The issues of values, ethics, and morals make up the unique ecosystem of each family unit. An environment of non-judgment, empathy, and caring provided by the therapist leads to clarification and hopefully increased well-being for each family member. The therapist attempts to connect to each individual as well as the family as a whole when in session. The most important point stressed is that the relationship is the most important component of the therapy process. Dr. Gaylin believes that everyone needs to be loved, accepted, and understood and when they are, they can open their hearts towards self-actualization.

Of course, this book needed to include Rogers six core conditions for effective therapy. Once again, Dr. Gaylin is able to take these conditions and weave them together in a way that makes them usable, sensible, and necessary for working with any clients. Working with families allows the therapist to glimpse how the interactions really occur rather than hearing them from an individual source. It creates a different type of therapeutic relationship but provides an in depth perspective that otherwise could not be obtained.

The idea of the incongruence in a family is defined by Dr. Gaylin as a discrepancy between how one or more family members perceive and experience the family. This is typically the reason change is sought. It is also the area that will ultimately change if there is willingness by each family member to tolerate the anxiety associated with creating both new ways of interacting and patterns of behavior. The last four conditions include: personal congruence of the therapist, unconditional positive regard (prizing the client), empathic understanding, and the client's perception of acceptance and empathy from the therapist.

The main difference outlined by Dr. Gaylin when working with families is that the therapist is continually moving between intra- and interpersonal dynamics. He has coined a phrase "interspace reflections" to describe reflections that are made to voice the shared meaning or interpersonal agreement or disagreement between family members. He reminds us that of course it is imperative to not take sides but rather to respond empathically to the individuals and address the interpersonal incongruence. I agree with Dr. Gaylin when he states that by creating greater understanding the actualizing tendency of individuals and families will be empowered.

This book provides a comprehensive healthy look at families. It describes working with them in a person-centered approach which will facilitate intimate relationships and hopefully change. It was a pleasure to read and will impact my work with individuals, couples, and families. I highly recommend it as required reading for courses of study in family counseling.

Reviewed by:
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